

Title

Maulvi Wahab bin Adam, Head of Ghana Ahmadiyya Mission in Ghana

Created

Owusu-Ansah, David
Adam. Maulvi Wahab bin

Description

Maulvi Wahad provided this interview to illustrate the history of the Ahmadiyya Mission in Ghana but most importantly to show the role of the Mission in the provision of secular education in the country. He also illustrated the moderating impact of the Mission on Islam in Ghana at the level that it has worked with other religions in the country.

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Wednesday 28 June 2005: Interview with Amir and Head of Ghana Ahmadiyya Mission, Maulvi Wahab bin Adam

Place of Interview: Ahmadiyya Head Office at Nyaniba Estate

Interview Topic: Islam and History of Religious Peace in Ghana.

Wednesday 28 June 2005 at the Head Office of the Ghana Ahmadiyya Mission (Nyaniba Estate in Accra).

Statement by Maulvi Adam:

Thank you very much. It is recognition that there is relative peace in the country. There is no doubt that religion has played a very important role in this. The truth is that credit should go to all the religious leaders in this country--both Christian and Muslims. I know that there was a time when there us to be conflict here and there. For many years [now] this has more or less disappeared and evaporated into thin air. It started with the conference that I organized in Kumase sometime ago. We have a day that we have set aside for that type of conference. We call it Religious Founders Day. Because the Ahmadiyya community believes that if God is the gracious God that we know him to be, then he could not have sent a prophet to a certain group of people in a certain time in history and neglected all the others. It is important that His grace and His favors should be opened to everybody else. So there has been a progression of religious guidance right from the time of Adam until now. So God is One and His teachings are also similar. They differ only because the teachings have come at different times in man's history and the level of understanding of man has not been the same at all times. So otherwise all the prophets are true messengers of Allah and all of them have brought massagers from the Almighty for the guidance of man. And so, Islam recognizes all the prophets--we are talking of some 120,000 and some of them have been mentioned in the Quran and some

have not been mentioned but what is important is that the Quran say that "To each people God has sent a Guidance", If that is the case, then all these prophets should be accepted as true messengers of God. The Quran also says that "We do not make any distinction between any of the prophets." So you cannot as a Muslim believe in the Prophet Muhammad (May Peace be on Him) and reject the Prophet Abraham; you cannot believe the Prophet Abraham and reject Prophet Moses or Believe in Prophet Moses and reject Jesus Christ. So we recognize the fact that if all of them are true, then it is important that we respect all these prophets, and in so doing you are also encouraging the adherents of these prophets to live together in peace and harmony. So for this purpose, we have this day--The Religious Founders Day--to celebrate them.

In Kumase as I have mentioned, the Voce Chancellor of the University of Science and Technology was the Chair of the meeting. I have invited Rev. Dr. Peter Akwasi Sarpong [Catholic Bishop of Kumase] to speak on "Christ and Christianity." I invited one Mr. Serepi. he used to be at the University of Ghana and he was a Buddhist so he was to speak on Buddhism. And I invited one Excellency Madam Muthama--She was the High Commissioner of India to Ghana--to speak on Krishna [and Hinduism]. I spoke on the Holy Prophet of Islam. Now the atmosphere that was created after the conference was so congenial that I was emboldened to suggest that we establish a Council of Religions in Ghana. I was aware at the time we had the Catholic Bishops Conference or the Secretariat and also there is the Christian Council of Ghana and you might be aware that the Catholic Bishops Conference is different from the Christian Council. The Christian Council is made up of the Protestant churches and some of the Pentecostal churches. We also have what they call the Islamic Representative Councils. I was also aware of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission. But I thought that though all these bodies are legitimate, useful, and good, there would still be a need to bring all of them together in the Forum of Council of Religions so that whenever there is any matter of national concern, all of us [religious leaders] could speak with one voice.

So when that suggestion was made, Bishop Sarpong immediately embraced it. Because he lives in Kumase and I in Accra, he decided to suggest one Dutch Catholic Minister (Rev. DeLeferry) in Accra and he suggested that I work with him. We started working on the constitution [of the new religious body] and a lot of others came in--including the then Secretary general of the Christian Council and then we had the Muslims coming in and other. We prepared the constitution and we got it registered with the government as Council of Religions. Having done that, we have been holding meetings but some of the members of the organization felt that to call it a Council of Religions was too [encompassing a] term and that we should rather [change the name and] call it The Forum of Religious Bodies because people are more comfortable with that. So we said okay, let is call it the Forum of Religious Bodies. The Forum of religious Bodies embraces all the religious communities in the country. We can always meet at the call of any of the groups and we have at times met at the offices of the Christian Council, sometimes at the Catholic Secretariat, and sometimes we met here [at the Ahmadiyya Head Office], and so a very congenial atmosphere was created. In case there was misunderstanding or dispute somewhere in the country between one religious community and another it was resolved there and then when the leaders met. We even went further to

ensure that whenever there was an issue of national important, we met and discussed it, and spoke with one voice. We actually issue joint-pastoral letters and that was the only time that I know of anywhere in the world when Muslims, Christian, and other come together and issue pastoral letters signed by all of them. Some of the things we did was, for instance, when the opposition [in parliament] in the Fourth Republic boycotted the [general] elections [of 1992] we felt that it was not good [for the country]. We invited all [of the political leaders] at the Christian Council under the Forum of the Religious Bodies and told them that we did not understand why they were boycotting the elections. So the opposition said that all this time they have not seen any occasion when the government had seen fit to sit down with [the opposition] and discuss [issues of the election so they had to boycott the election]. So we said, supposing we got the government to sit down with you [would you be pleased with that, and they said that [they will be very happy. We immediately contacted the Head of State at the time [J. J. Rawlings] and he said yes that we can see the political committee of the party and when we went, we saw Justice Annan, and [Kojo] Tsikata and we told them that this is what the opposition leaders are saying. [The government's political committee agreed to meet the opposition leaders]. We arranged the meeting at the State House. I cannot say that the meeting yielded the desired results, but at least we know that the Forum of Religious Bodies [took] the matter seriously and we had contacted the government at the time and we have conveyed to them the feelings of the opposition party and we were able to bring them together. The rest was between them to redress--whether they was going to have results or not was immaterial but it tells you that this is something that was very useful that we were able to do.

Apart from that there was once a dispute between President [Rawlings] and his vice. As a Forum of religious Bodies, we went to see the Vice-President and we went to see [also] the then president, His Excellency J. J. Rawlings. The idea was to help them to patch up and stay together in peace. We have also been monitoring elections [as a Forum of Religious Bodies]. The elections that have been taking place in the country, we have monitored as observers and we have issued reports on our observations of elections to help give credibility to the elections. This make people know that so long as the Religious Bodies are involved, [the results will be fair] and credible.

We have also worked on compassion--for people living with HIV/AIDS. We realize that people with AIDS were rejected by the majority of the country they felt bad about it, [infected] people did not even declare that they had the disease [for fear of being rejects] and they continued to infect others. Religious Bodies are generally reluctant about things related to HIV because some of the [Religious people] believe that it was mere punishment from God as a result of promiscuity and others. While this might be partially true, we have also to admit that children who are born with HIV cannot be accused of promiscuity. There are also those who are infested with the wanzam blade [traditional circumcision blade]; what about the people who are infected by injections? Not all [HIV/AIDS patients are] promiscuous! There are also those who are infested with the wanzam blade [traditional circumcision blade]; what about the people who are infected by injections? Not all [HIV/AIDS patients are] promiscuous! So we have to recognize the fact that they are also part of society and we have to show compassion to them. This was

a project that was then in collaboration with USAID and it was very helpful because we have several workshops--some held in Accra and others held outside Accra. We came out with a view that Religious Bodies would have to get involved to get this matter out [to educate]. This was done--tapes were made, videos were made, and there were TV Ads showing a Muslim leader [for example] embracing someone with HIV/AIDS, or a Muslim leader saying the "We Must Show Compassion" to the HIV/AIDS patients." That had a very useful impact because people in this country belong to one religion or the other and that is the reality. So when they see their leaders taking a cause, they at least listen and those who can go by it accept it. I have just given you a few of the things that we have done. There is no doubt that [these joint actions] have created such a useful atmosphere in the country that when religious Leaders in this country meet they call one another by their first names...it shows the level of collaboration that we have achieved.

While this is the case, there is another dimension [to our collaboration]--that is the World Conference of Religion for Peace [which came in about 2003]. The WCRP is an International Religious Organization with similar aims and objectives as the Forum of Religious Bodies. When the existence of this [WCRP] was brought to our attention, we embraced it because we wanted to give a global dimension to what we had in Ghana. This was formally inaugurated by the President, His Excellency Agyekum Kufour at the Labadi Royal Palms Hotel. Since then, we have held elections and Cardinal Peter Turkson is the President of the Organization and I happen to be the Vice President [of the World Council of Religion for Peace, Ghana].

It is very interesting when there are meetings. For example, when the Catholics have celebrations or some important functions, they invite us to attend and we deliver fraternal messages. And when we also invite them to our activities they come to deliver fraternal messages. Whenever there is any problems or any of us feel that there is something that needs to be looked at, we only have to tell one of our members and we organize and talk and discuss. This has been a success story [or religious cooperation]. I believe that it could be replicated in other places. This is the total picture of religions in the country. But then there is also the important aspect of harmonious relations between the Ahmadiyya Muslim community and the other Muslims in the country--this has been a sore point in various countries.

Q. I would like you to comment [on the Ahmadiyya Muslim and other Muslim relations in Ghana] because in the history sources, and even in West Africa and especially in Nigeria, there has been criticism of the Ahmadiyya. They do not accept the [Ahmadiyya even as] as a Muslim sect. They argue that the Ahmadiyya are NOT Muslims at all.

A. That is simple. I would like to say that it is not surprising really that a thing like that should happen. It happens in all reform organizations because when for instance when Jesus Christ [on Him be Peace] appeared the Jews rejected him completely and they were not even considering the prophecies that already existed before his coming neither did they listen to his interpretations of the earlier prophecies. It will therefore not surprise anybody that when the Ahmadiyya community came into being, the other Muslims said no. But the truth is that there are prophecies about the coming of the Mahdi.

Q. Let's stop here and if one were to explain this to students, they will like to know about the difference between the Ahmadiyya Movement and the other Muslims.

A. The only difference is that we [the Ahmadiyya] believe in the appearance of the Mahdi [Messiah] who was promised by the Holy Prophet of Muslims. We say that he has appeared and we have accepted him and we go by the interpretation of the Quran and the traditions. The other [Muslims] are saying that no, the man [promised messiah] will come at a letter date from the Heavens and we will see him descending from there and so far as we do not see somebody coming from the Heavens, we are not going to accept that the Messiah has come. We say that from the creation of the world until today, we have not seen a single prophet (including the Prophet Muhammad) descending from the Heavens. [All the Prophets] were all born like human beings, even Jesus Christ who was born without a male agency he too was born. So we are saying that the interpretation that they put on the "coming down of the Mahdi" is rather too literal. These are metaphorical expressions and when we say that someone "is coming from high" we mean that he is coming from God with the authority of God. Without going into all the intricacies of this, I just want to comment on the cordial relationships that here in Ghana, we [the Ahmadiyyas] have tried to create between ourselves and the other Muslim communities.

[We (the Ahmadiyya of Ghana) used to have conflict with the other Muslims here too]. There was a time when there was agitation and conflicts especially in places like Wa [Upper West Regional capital] where Imam Sally was sent out of his own hometown several times and they did not allow the members of the Ahmadiyya community to go to the market place to trade or to buy the necessities of life. They were not allowed to go to the general place to fetch water and even to go to farm to collect food from their own farms. Most of these things have died down. What I believe has contributed to this [relative peace] is what I have already told you about. The second is the fact that earlier on, the other Muslims were not prepared to have anything at all to do with the Ahmadiyya Muslims community. They felt that there is no need to have anything to do with us. Then came a program on TV known as "Akida". It is a program that comes on TV on Fridays and it is a government sponsored program. This gives all the Muslim Groups in the country the opportunity to get their sermons telecast. Some of their celebrations telecast. To hold discussions, sometimes between the Ahmadis and the other Muslims. This has been very useful by letting the pother Muslims know that after all there isn't that much in divergence in views [between the Ahmadiyya movement and the main steam Muslims] because when we sit together and we discuss religious we are all passionate about God, and that all of us are very passionate about Islam, all of us are very passionate about the Holy Quran, all of us are very passionate about spreading the true teachings of Islam among those who are not Muslims. So that has been very useful.

It has also been useful in the sense that it has broadened the outlook of the other Muslims. First, they were not interested in secular education--some of the fights we had in the past were based on the fact that they felt that secular education would bring people out of the armpit of Islam [and lead to conversion into Christianity]. They felt that if you learn English you will go to Hell. It is the language of the infidel and the study of science will

make people less Islamic. They have completely forgotten that it was rather the religion of Islam that produced all these disciplines. They needed somebody to explain it to them. So if they did not have any contact with you [us] how were they going to get this message? So through the Akida Program, there has been this cross-fertilization of ideas. It has indeed been very helpful. Also because of that [the non-knowledge of English and emphasis on the traditional Islamic language of Arabic] the sermons were not being delivered in languages that the people could understand. They just read a few passages from Arabic and that was it. These [Arabic] books were written several centuries ago and have nothing to do with present day issues. This is not the essence of sermons. Sermons are to be current and must affect the lives of people living today in the light of the Holy Quran and the Traditions [Hadith]. So when they saw the way we delivered our sermons- at times we read quotations from the Quran, we translated it from the Arabic to English and the same was translated into the local Akan and Ga and so on. They saw the usefulness of this way of looking at things. Before they will never do it but when they saw the practicality of it and the impact it made, they too started doing it. This is very useful so the [Akida] brought us closer and closer until finally I invited them for another conference.

The conference was to deal with the question of "fasting". In Ghana, what happened was that we will start the [Ramadan] fasting today, and then so Muslims would have started three days earlier. So Muslims will start a day later. It used to be very embarrassing because that meant that because we couldn't start the fast together, we were not able to break the fast together. Thus when it came to Eid-ul-Fitr people were celebrating it at different times. So when you meet Christian friends, they will confront you with the question as why Muslims could not for once [at least on one of the important events in Islam] come together to break bread on the same day.

When I studied the question carefully, I saw that Muslims of this country owe allegiance to certain Arab countries. You know some of them seek guidance from Saudi Arabic because they give the money to build mosques. Those [Muslims] who seek assistance from Saudi Arabic will look to Saudi Arabic for selecting their day to start the fast. Those [in Ghana] who got assistance from Kuwait will look to Kuwait to start the fasting, and so on and so forth. The result was that [there was not agreement when fasting should start on Ghana]. This is something that was wrong because we needed to understand that we needed to look for the appearance of the crescent but the crescent must be look for in our own country and not from other countries. Saudi Arabic has three hours differences in time so you cannot simple go by their time for the fasting. In fact there was even the joke that a Muslim celebration could not be started by indication of the crescent in a non-Muslim country. I invited the Chief Imam. I can tell you that the present Chief Imam is very instrumental in getting the people to collaborate so we brought this to his attention and we agreed to hold a conference. This conference was held at their own mosque at Abbosey Okai and I went there; he has invited all his local Imams and from the regions. I presented this to them that we [as Muslims in Ghana] must look for the crescent from within our country. There and then, the Hillel Committee [The Joint Ahmadiyya-Ghana Orthodox Muslim Committee] was born. I had some Muslim leaders coming from Parliament, and some from among the Imams and some Muslim who are lecturers [from

the Universities] were all there. The Hillel Committee has the responsibility to monitor the appearance of the Crescent for the Ramadan and announce it through the country in the name of the Chief Imam and myself for all Muslims in the country [including the Ahmadis] to begin the fast on that particular day; if we see the crescent tonight, the following day we start the fast. So with this arrangement, we have representatives of the Chief Imam and the representatives of the Ahmadiyya community. So our representatives [of the Hillel Committee] will monitor and then announce to the whole Muslim community. We have contacted the Inspector General of Police so that we could use his facilities throughout the country [making such facilities to the Muslims] so if somebody saw the Crescent they can report it to the nearest Police Station and that will be transmitted and then all of us will get to know and if we agree to it, we will announce the start of the fast. It has been very useful and the result is that the Parliament of Ghana met and decided to give us [Muslims] two public holidays to celebrate the Eid-ul-Fitr [End of the Ramada Fasting Period] and the Eid-ul-Adha [holy Feasting of the Prophet's Birthday]. So we realize that [Muslim holidays have not been recognized in the past] because of our own disunity. [Who was the government grant the holidays? Was it to recognize those who started the fasting yesterday, or today?]. When the government saw that we have all come together, they gave us a holiday [which is celebrated by all]—Christians, Muslims, and Embassies Abroad. The advantage is that a Muslim [now] does not have to go to a non-Muslim boss to ask for permission to go celebrate his religious holiday. In fact, the “Mirror” which is a newspaper not known for writing on religious issues but more interested in fashion wrote an editorial and said that “what the Muslims have done today is a lesson for all the political organizations in the country, for all the religious bodies in the country and all other groupings because it showed that people can sit down to talk, arrive a decision and go by it.” This is very encouraging.

Q. When you talk about the Chief Imam, you mean that he represents the Sunni Muslims in Ghana and the Amir of the Ahmadiyya Mission represents the Ahmadis. So there are two Muslim groups in Ghana. So the fasting on Ramadan is an issue on which you can have disagreements which you have resolved through the [Hillel Committee]. Now, the issue of the Hajj (the Muslim Pilgrimage) how does this affect relations among Muslims in Ghana?

A. Originally, as I have already mentioned, people who felt that we [Ahmadis] were non-Muslims will prevent us from going to Mecca to perform the Hajj. Our attitude was that the Hajj, according to the Holy Quran, was “meant for those people for whom the way is opened.” If you are prevented or stopped then you don't go [there is no compulsion in this]. So that has been our attitude and we did mind [care] very much. All we can do is to make the effort and if there is an impediment to block the effort then we just stop by believing that God has already accepted our spirit of faith so that has been the case.

Now there used to be people [from the orthodox Muslim community] who will go to the Saudi Arabian Embassy and sit there and [identify Ahmadis trying to obtain visas to go on Hajj and tell the Embassy not to grant visas to the Ahmadis]. There had been even a case when a person who is presently a Member of the Council of State (his name is

Alhassan b, Salley] and was formerly the Senior Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Finance from Wa was given a visa to go to Mecca. He boarded the plane and was on board when somebody. But somebody had gone to the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to insist that his [Alhassan's] visa be cancelled. So the Ambassador went to the plane and got [Alhassan] off board. That has also happened in the past. So what it tells you is that it is pressure from within [the Ghana orthodox Muslim community] that creates the problem. I remember that in the past some of our members from Wa [had the same problem]. So the then Amir of the Ahmadiyya Mission took me along and we went to the Saudi Arabian Embassy [to investigate the issue]. What the [Saudi] Ambassador said was "look I am an envoy from Saudi Arabia, I am not a religious person so I know nothing about these controversies. But what we have been told is that you people have a different form of prayer and when they put pressure to bear upon us, we cannot say no because they can report us to our government." So we agreed to do one thing—to find out whether our prayer is different from the normal prayer. So we brought a Muslim prayer book published by us and we went through it and he [agreed that this is the same prayer for all Muslims]. In addition to this, we told him that Yusuf Ali has a translation of the Quran and the Saudi government was distributing this translation. So we told him that we wanted him to produce that Quran so we can show him something. In the introduction/foreword, it is written there that the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission was the first to translate the Quran into English and other languages. So we told him, that if we are not Muslims and if we are not interested in the Quran and the spread of the message, then why would we have taken the trouble to translate it? When [the Ambassador saw this] do you know what his reaction was? He said this has not come to the notice of my government otherwise they would have tried to remove it from the introduction. So this tells you that this is all politics. I will give you evidence to this. Sir Muhammad Zafarullah Khan [the first Foreign Minister of Pakistan] was a very strong member of the [Ahmadi community and known all over the world. If you have time, we will show you the exhibition hall and you will see a picture of him [Zafarullah Khan] with the Crown Prince who became King Faisal. They were together at the London Mosque. This gentleman [Zafarullah Khan] became the first Foreign Minister of Pakistan. Through him, a lot of other Arab states got their political independence [because he was a strong support of the Muslim independence movement]. He was also once the Chairman of the General Assembly of the UN; served at the World Court and he finally became President of the International Court of Justice. This man never hid the fact that he was an Ahmadiyya; yet he was invited by the King of Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj. Why did he [the King extend the invitation]? Simply because in the world he [Zafarullah Khan] was known and he held a high position. So it is not religion but politics because if they sincerely believe that as Ahmadis we are not worthy of going to Mecca to perform the Hajj, then they shouldn't have invited Zafarullah Khan. He was there as the guest of the Saudi State. So this is all politics.

Fortunately, this [prohibition on Ahmadis from going to the Hajj] has decreased considerably. A lot of Ahmadis go to Mecca. My first Deputy performed the Hajj last year. The truth is that the form for the visa application does not ask of your sect. It only requires you to state your religion and you write "Islam". That should be enough. It is only when someone want to be mischievous that they will say that no, no you can't go.

[This should not be the case] because people are going; Shiites are going [to Mecca on Hajj]. People go from Iran and there are times that the Iranians have problem with Saudi Arabia and there has been conflicts right in Saudi Arab and yet they [the Iranians] have been allowed to go [to Saudi Arab on Hajj]. So it is not a question of religion but internal politics and religious rivalries as it happened in the times of Muhammad b. Abdul Wahab [the prophet himself] He was prevented from going to Mecca and his follower were prevented from going to Mecca for 12 years. Now they all call themselves Wahabis. But in Islamic teachings, especially in the matter of Hajj, God Himself tells you that “It is not a thing that is compulsory” such as prayer which you have to do 5 times a day. But even here [with prayers] people are being prevented to pray. For the Hajj, God says that “if you are prevented, just don’t worry and the prophet sent that example for us.”

Q. Who is preventing people from praying?

A. It is happening in Pakistan. You have heard about Shiites are being killed in the Mosque, and Sunnis being killed in the Mosque [in Pakistan]. That is prevention from prayer.

Q. But [people are not prevented from prayer] in Ghana.

A. Oh, no, no. no! I just said that [to illustrate that] prayer that is something that every Muslim do but Hajj is not that [an important requirement].

Q. Can we make the observation that the Ahmadiyya Movement has a history of using the same Quran [and not a separate content Quran]?

A. Yes, it is just like the Catholic and the Protestants. It is like an [argument about] whether the Bible should be translated or should it remain in its Latin? We think that we have to translate it so that everybody can participate in Islam. That has been our position. Over time, people come to accept it even though we have suffered persecution in the beginning. But the interesting thing about it is that all that we [the Ahmadiyya] have been doing have gradually come to be accepted because earlier on, even when we had conferences, we were criticized as non-Islamic and now they are all holding conferences. They said that secular education is bad, and now they have English/Arabic schools.

Q. Why don’t we talk a little about the way the Ahmadiyya Muslim Movement in Ghana led the course of moderation? So talk about the secular education that the Ahmadiyya Movement started in Ghana for Muslims?

A. Secular education that we started has been very useful because you cannot have a country to make program when you have half educated and half uneducated [citizens]. Everybody in the country has the right to learn. Unfortunately, some of our Muslims had come up with the idea that getting our children to go the normal [secular] schools will take them out of the religion of Islam. We think otherwise. We feel that first it is a legacy of Islam [to be educated] and we must keep [the tradition of leaning] up. Secondly, it is important that we learn so that we can [keep] abreast with time. Thirdly, it

is important that we acquire secular education so that we can be useful to our community. But [the fear of the other Muslims about secular education] for their children also needs accommodation and understanding because there were times in this country when the schools that operated though funded with tax payers money were handed to Christian and the Christians used those schools for their religion. So Ibrahim when to school and they say no you have to change your name to Abraham. So I think that it is because of some of these things that some of the Muslims genuinely felt that if they sent their children to [school] they will be turned into Christians—the best is to let them stay at home.

We [the Ahmadiyya Mission] felt that in order to convince them of the importance of such [secular school], we should not only talk about it light of [Muslim] history or even in light of the Quran and the tradition but [we must become practical about it] by setting up schools no matter how few or no matter how elementary [these schools were]. The idea was to set example. So the [Ahmadiyya] missionaries who came to [the Gold Coast, now Ghana] in 1921—in a year or two—had already began setting up schools. They had one at Saltpond which they considered as model school for the whole area. I understand that the then Governor—Gordon Guggisberg—visited the school, so that was something that was to show the [other] Muslims that secular education is useful. [Our schools are] in the various regions of the country, Central Region, Ashanti Region, and everywhere we set up schools. The one that we set up in Kumase [in the Ashanti Regions] for example [was established] in 1950; it has trained so many people who are holding important positions in the country and the Ahmadiis feel that this is the way to go.

Q. Professor Emmanuel Akyeampong who is the program director for this research and is Professor of History at Harvard University was trained at the Kumase Ahmadiyya Secondary Schools.

A. Do you mean this? Oh and let me also tell you that the two Moderators of the [Ghana] Presbyterian Church both of them—the one two just retired and the one who just replaced him—were educated at T. I. Ahmadiyya Secondary School [in Kumase]. These are the top religious leaders in Ghana and nobody converted them into Islam [when they attended our schools]. So the idea is that the [establishment of a school like this] even brings about religious harmony because when the students are together—because our schools are opened to all (Christians and Muslims—then the question of discrimination on the basis or religion—do not arise.

Q. I notice on the Board downstairs at the Main Office Entry the number of schools and their distributions. Can you give me a rough idea of the distributions?

A. I think we are talking about the primary schools, JSS (junior secondary schools), senior secondary schools (SSS), teacher training college, missionary training college, vocational training centers—we have about 300 [educational institutions]. I think the actual figure can be provided by the general manager since this is going to be a written record [See plaque in image for the numbers].

Q. I know for sure that they have 8 Senior Secondary Schools. My research in 2002 I [found] an Islamic Secondary School—a private institution own by Alhajj Appiadu in Kumase. Is [this school] different from the [Ahmadiyya schools]?

A. Only yesterday, it was announced that Saudi Arabia has given them [the private Islamic Secondary School in Kumase] some millions of cedis to expand that school. I don't know if that is the school but that school was subjected to court adjudication because there was conflict over the ownership of the school over the amount received.

Q. Can you [comment on the National Reconciliation Committee that the government established in 2001 to redress issues of political murders in Ghana]. The committee had a number of representatives, but to be blunt—why were you [as Amir of the Ahmadiyya Mission] put on the committee and NOT the National Imam?

A. Okay. Actually, the National Reconciliation Commission was meant to reconcile the people of Ghana. Those people who were put on the [committee] were [selected] because of their personal standing in society—that is people who will be accepted by the general public because of what people perceive them to believe in and what they are perceived to have done. That is how a person like Palmer Buckle [Catholic Bishop] was put on it and not the overall head of the Catholic Church. Palmer Buckle had been very vocal on public matters and pointed to some of the wrong things and human rights and the need for people to conduct themselves properly. Thus public perception [counted] so he was put there on his personal standing in the society. I believe that I was put [on the committee] for the same reason. Now that also tells you that there has been a very different approach to matters now [among the Muslims] than it was before. In the past, when there was conflict between Ahmadiyya and the other Muslims [my placement on a national commission] could have lead to [much protest from the other Muslims] from all over the country. This time, not a single voice was against [my appointment] so much so that when I visited certain parts of the country, especially the North, some Muslim leaders who were chiefs have told me in public that because of my membership on the National Reconciliation Commission they are have full faith in the work of the Commission. This is a complete departure from the past and it is something worth noting because this would not have been accepted in the past... and not protested just as the Christians did not protest and accepted the membership pf Palmer Buckle.

Q. Let me go back to the subject of education. The issue of funding for education—there are individuals who may think that there is an issue of conflict in government funding for Christian schools historical. In my conversation with some of the Muslim leaders, [it has] been argued that secular education, secular schools need to be funded yet they say that government does not fund the emerging Muslim schools as strongly as the Muslims might want to get [their schools] to par with other secular schools. How are the T. I. Ahmadiyya schools funded? Do you get funding from somewhere else or does the [Ahmadiyya] Muslim community raise its own money?

A. You see the truth is that we have the Ghana Education Service. The Ghana Education Service has its own funding rules and as they do with the university funding we have

accreditations rules for all schools. Before a school is brought to the public or “assisted standard,” it has to maintain certain standards. You have to start the school with on your own funding, you make sure that there are students/pupils], you will pay the teachers to a certain degree. When the government or the Education Service feels that you have brought it to a certain level that they must come to your aid, then it is then that [the school receives] public assistance. So you may run a school for ten year or even more but if you do not bring it to a certain level, you will never get the public funding. Then there are certain organizations that want to keep their schools private—there are so many primary private schools in the country. Because when you keep it private you have more control over it and you can teach what you want, but even that requires some form of registration. But if you make it, you bring to the public system you will be bound by all the rules and regulations of the Ghana Education Service. [You cannot refuse to teach Bible knowledge together with Islamic knowledge if the Education Service,] wants you to do so. If they want you to do sports you can not refuse. If there are certain [school] periods that must be [devoted] to something else you cannot refuse to do so. So everything that goes on [in the running of a] public school you have to abide by that. So I do not know why they [the Muslim leaders] are saying [what they have said].

It is possible that they themselves want to keep their schools private and run it the way they wish, or that maybe they have not been able to bring it to the level where the government can step in] to assist. I know that most of our secondary schools were established in 1971. T. I Ahmadiyya Secondary School in Kumase is the only exception [established in 1950]. Now when the then Head of the [Ahmadiyya] community came to Ghana in 1970, he announced what was called the “Service to Humanity Scheme” and under this scheme, we set up these schools as well as hospitals. Now we conducted these schools for 10 years and I know that when I became the Amir [Head of Mission] not a single [of these schools] were public funded. All of them were run privately because we have not at that time brought them to the level that the government could assist us. So it went on gradually and for then years we paid the teachers, we put up the building, we made sure that there were students, we subsidized students’ feedings and so on. And when we brought the schools to the standard that the government felt they could support us, it was then that the schools were absorbed.

Q. Did you have to appeal to the government or inform the government that you want the schools to be absorbed?

A. No. They know because from time to time they go around and inspect the schools. They have [Ghana Education Service] Officials who go around. For instance, the [Ahmadiyya] school at Wa which is a Teacher Training College did not start as a Teacher’s College. But when they [the Education Service] went to inspect the school to study the trend in education and schooling in that locality, they discovered that though there were so many primary schools [in the region] there was not a single Teacher Training College in that whole locality. So they suggested that they wanted [the Ahmadiyya Private Secondary School] to become a Teacher Training College and we agreed. We negotiated with them and they took it over.

Q. In that case the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission in Ghana in this case does not only moderate but also takes the lead in the advancement of the country?

A. Yes, we try to do this because there are so many misconceptions about Islam all over the world. After the 9/11, we started talking about the fact that Islam being a peaceful religion and that those who do hijacking also hijacked Islam. But all the same, we have all kinds of misunderstanding about Islam. Only a few weeks ago, there was a function at the British Council Hall [sponsored] by the Ghana Academy of Art and Sciences on lectures on the reconciliation process and the way forward, and there was one British person who got to know in our conversation that I was once in London ad the chief Imam and he said that “thinks in Britain are not easy as they were in the 1970s”. So I asked why [that was the case] and he [referred to things in America] but apart from that they are having a lot of misunderstanding [and perceptions about Islam]—[such as the view] that Islam is a violent religion, Muslims are bad, Islam is spread at the point of the sword. So when a religion is that misunderstood, it is important that any [aspect of that religion] that intends to show the true Islam should do things properly for people to see that it is not Islam [that is violent] but the people who are doing it.

Q. Though the committees and Conferences, have Ghanaian Muslims, including the Ahmadiyya, talked about this particular perceptions on Islam?

A. Before, they [the other Muslims] didn't hold meetings and conferences, but since they started holding conferences along the line that we did, they have been inviting people from the outside such as government officials and so on. Most of the time, [government officials] talk to them [the Muslims] about the need for education and the need for tolerance. When [government officials] come to our conferences, they do not talk those things because they know that we are beyond that so they know that these [negative things] are perceptions. [People are becoming aware that these are] perceptions and with time things will be better than now.

Q. Let me get your biography [for the project] before I end the interview:

A. This is simple. I come from Fomena in the Adanse of Ghana [in the Ashante Region [on my mother side]. My father comes from Anomabo [in the Central Region]. So that is why I can always adjust [because I am multi-regional (Asante and Fante background)]. I went to Methodist Primary School and then to a United Senior School at Brofoyedu where I was born (in the Adanse area). There was a time [on the old road to Kumase was such that] people traveling to Kumase from the south had to stop at Brofoyedu because of the Scarp. So my mother decide to build at Brofoyedu because she was advised that Brofoyedu was a more prosperous place [to build and trade] than Kumase. That is why she came to stay there and I was born there.

I went to Ahmadiyya Secondary School and later on to Pakistan to study in a Theological Institution and came back in 1960 when I was appoint [Ahmadiyya] Missionary for Brong Ahafo. I worked in the North and also in Accra, and I worked also as Principal for our Mission Training College at Saltpond. Then I was recalled to Pakistan and after 9

months stay there, I was sent to London to be the Chief Imam of the [Ahmadiyya] London Mosque. From there [London] I was appointed Amir of the Ghana Mission in 1975 and I have been here since.

Q. It will be interesting for students to hear that you were trained in Pakistan where there is much crisis in Islam. Yet in Pakistan has other communities that are peaceful.

A. Yes, in fact, the Ahmadiyya community has been in Pakistan for a long time. And now [Ahmadis in Pakistan] are being persecuted. The leader of [the Ahmadi] community for the last 20 years has been in London [and not in Pakistan] because of persecution [of Ahmadis]. There are messages of hate against Ahmadis and they could burn our farms and our shops and the government [of Pakistan] does not take any action [to protect Ahmadis]. They even say that if we use any words from the Quran that we can be arrested [because they don't consider us Muslims]. So it is within a place like this [in Ghana] that the community is strong and thriving. Now we are in about 100 countries in the world and both in the United States and Canada and other places you see thriving [Ahmadiyya communities]. In Toronto, for example, we have a beautiful mosque. In Toronto, the beauty of it is that they have set up a House which they call the 'Abode of Peace'—a 14 story building—and that place is known by the authorities to be one of the few places where no drugs and alcohol is allowed and people go steadily about their normal business. So wherever we are, we try to be peaceful, we try to cooperate with everybody, collaborate with other religious bodies to promote peace in the world. That is the essence of Islam because Islam means Peace.

Q. That is a wonderful conversation and [I wonder if this is not a] good place to stop?

A. Let me tell you one more thing. I do not know [if you might come] across it or not. But there is also the general believe that the punishment for adultery in Islam is stoning to death as was the case in Nigeria. This has created such confusion in the minds of people about the religion of Islam. During one of our conferences, I took this matter up and I said that "this simply cannot be true just because it is not in the Quran." It created a little bit of controversy because people have taken it for granted that it is in the Quran, but it is not. So when I said it everybody was baffled. So I said if it is in the Quran, show me. The truth is that the Quran is the most comprehensive guidance for Muslims and nothing in the Quran can be challenges. When God say that if a person is guilty of adultery we should be given lashes, then there is not question, but stoning does not come in. If we say that the Prophet said that, then we have to find out the circumstance for such a statement because the Holy prophet cannot say a thing that is clearly opposed to the Quran. I explained all this. And now people are beginning to understand it. [See a copy of the pamphlet] because this is something that people use to refer to Islam as barbaric but Islam does not say so.

End of Conversation: Thanks you so much for the conversation!